

*Testimony of Christine Beck Lissitzyn, J.D., former attorney, professor at the University of Hartford, and current student at Southern Connecticut State University in the MFA in Creative Writing Program. February 28, 2011*

Good evening, Senator Harp, Representative Walker, Sen. Maynard, Rep. Willis, and members of the Committee. Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify before you. I am a graduate student at Southern Connecticut State University in the Masters in Creative Writing Program.

I am a graduate of the University of California at Berkeley, Phi Beta Kappa, and of its Boalt Hall School of Law. I believe in the excellence of state schools. I chose Southern Connecticut State University for my master's degree because I knew the faculty were passionately devoted both to their craft of writing and to their students.

I oppose the proposal to combine the Connecticut State University system with our community colleges because I know first-hand what results when two incompatible academic units are combined. In the year 2000, after twenty years as a practicing lawyer, I joined the University of Hartford as Associate Professor and Chair of the Paralegal Studies Department, which was then one of two departments at the Hartford College for Women, a college of the University of Hartford.

Our students were primarily what are called "nontraditional students," meaning working adults, who for a variety of reasons, had not been able to complete or sometimes even begin, a college education. Teaching working adults after they had worked a full day was a challenge and inspiration for me, and a far greater accomplishment than winning a case in court.

Three years later, the University of Hartford decided, for budget reasons, to disband the academic programs at the Hartford College for Women and transfer them to the College of Arts and Sciences at the University. Overnight, the Paralegal Studies Department went from being the flagship program of the Hartford College for Women to the "night school" of the largest college at the University. Did the move save money? Yes. Was it "worth it?" I truly believe the answer was No. The mindset of the College of Arts and Sciences was geared toward the needs and academic abilities of young students. Our program was geared toward students for whom a college education was the answer to a long-deferred dream. There was no "better" group of students. Just different. But our students nearly got lost in the system.

In 2009, the University recognized that it had put a "square peg in a round hole" and Paralegal Program was transferred to the Department of University Studies, which provides programs for Adult and Graduate Students, where it has thrived.

My experience illustrates the danger of making a quick decision to save money without considering the effect on the students, faculty, and ethos of an organization.

I urge you not to make a quick decision in a tough budgetary climate that may dilute the quality of a fine school. Please vote no on this proposal.

